

# Osage, Legend and Arkansas History: Fact or Fiction

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Revised 2007-08 School Year Utilizing 2006 Social Studies Frameworks Including  
2007 Arkansas History Amendments and 2007 School Library Media Frameworks

This lesson serves to spark interest in the study of Arkansas' three Native American groups by using an Arkansas legend, "Norristown Mountain". Students will evaluate the authenticity of the legend, "Norristown Mountain," by comparing facts about the Osage Indians and the legend. Students will develop an excitement for studying Arkansas' Native American groups through the exploration of legends, culture, and traditions that tie, specifically, the Osage to Arkansas' past.

**Grades:** 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>  
(Lesson may also be used with grades fifth through eighth.)

## Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks Correlations:

### Arkansas History Student Learning Expectations:

**H.6.3.14** Describe the early American Indian *cultures* in Arkansas

**H.6.4.10** Examine *artifacts* relating to events in Arkansas history

**H.6.4.14** Identify and describe the Arkansas Indian Tribes:  
\* Osage  
\* Quapaw  
\* Caddo

**H.6.4.15** Identify the reasons for the decline of the native populations of Arkansas

**H.6.5.29** Locate and describe the three main American Indian cultures in Arkansas during the exploration period:  
\* Quapaw Indians  
\* Caddo Indians  
\* Osage Indians

**EA.2.AH.7-8.3** Compare and contrast the cultural characteristics of early Indian tribes in Arkansas:  
\* Osage  
\* Caddo  
\* Quapaw

**TPS.4.AH.7-8.8** Discuss the decline and removal of American Indian tribes in Arkansas

### Social Studies Student Learning Expectations:

**H.6.3.8** Compare artifacts from events in various periods in history

**G.1.4.4** Determine absolute locations (latitude and longitude) of places studied using a grid map

**G.1.5.7** Recognize the various types of maps used by geographers

**School Library Media Student Learning Expectations:**

**A.3.3.1, A.3.4.1, A.3.5.1, A.3.6.1, A.3.7.1, A.3.8.1** – Practice organizational strategies to record and synthesize information

**Related Encyclopedia of Arkansas Entries:**

[Native Americans](#); [Lovely County](#); [Folklore and Folklife](#)

**Introduction:**

The teacher will select the appropriate student learning expectations for his or her class, review the key terms, gather materials and make copies of "legend" included in the lesson.

Collaboration with the school library media specialist for assistance with the utilization of the technology resource tool for Arkansas History is suggested. See above links or visit the online *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture* at <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net>.

**Key Terms:** Legend; Dowser; Divining Rod

**Suggested Timeline:** Two Class Periods

**Materials:**

Access to Internet

Graphic Organizer

Various pieces of silver jewelry

A divining rod

A picture of an Osage Indian

Five copies of "Norristown Mountain" from *Buried Treasure of the American Southwest*, W.C. Jameson

Large Arkansas map

Writings about Osage Indians (may include student Arkansas history textbooks)

**Procedure**

**Day One Activities:**

Explain to students that this lesson will focus on a legend. Help students define legend. Supply students with the definition if necessary. Have students discuss how a legend might fit into history. Ask, "Is it fact or fiction?" "What would be a possible purpose of a legend?" Discuss the difference between fiction and historical fiction (i.e. historical fiction includes both facts and fiction). Discuss fact and opinion.

Show and discuss pieces of silver jewelry, a divining rod, and a picture of an Osage Native American. Ask students to write their response to "What do these three items have to do with treasure and Arkansas?"

Discuss the terms dowser and divining rod. Locate Norristown Mountain (35 degrees N and 93 degrees W) on the Arkansas map, identifying it as the setting of the legend. Read aloud the story of "Norristown Mountain." Discuss the story with questions about what was on the mountain, who owned the mountain, why did the Indians have to move, what ties did the

Indians keep with the mountain and why do you think they kept their tradition of going back to the mountain? Ask students if the story is believable. Which parts would they consider fact or fiction? Divide students into cooperative groups. Hand out copies of "Norristown Mountain." Provide students with other resources about the Osage Indians. Ask students to compare the legend with facts from their reading about the Osage.

Have students share and discuss the "correctness" of their earlier predictions concerning the three items, Arkansas, and treasure. Discuss possible reasons legends are intriguing. Students may complete the graphic organizer during class as supervised by the teacher. Explain the assessment task to students. Be sure to share the scoring guide (rubric) with the students.

### **Activities: Day Two:**

Review Day One activities and information as needed. Have students complete their graphic organizers. Using their completed graphic organizers, students will write a short essay comparing Osage facts and the "Norristown" legend.

### **Evaluation Rubric:**

**Advanced:** The student identifies four facts about the Osage tribe. The student identifies four "hearsay facts" or opinions from the legend. The student makes three statements comparing how the Osage fact and the "Norristown" legend are alike and different. The student elaborates on the comparison. The student illustrates his/her writing.

**Proficient:** The student identifies four facts about the Osage tribe. The student identifies four "hearsay facts" or opinions from the legend. The student makes three statements comparing how the Osage fact and the "Norristown" legend are alike and different.

**Basic:** The student identifies four facts about the Osage tribe. The student identifies four "hearsay facts" or opinions from the legend. The student attempts to make a comparison between the Osage fact and the "Norristown" legend.

**Below Basic:** The task is incomplete.

### **Extension:**

Continue studying Arkansas Native Americans by assigning one of the three tribes to student groups to research. Have groups create a game "Fact or Legend" to present information about their Native American tribe. The groups write 10-20 statements about their assigned Native Americans. The other groups participate as competing teams playing the game. Participants should respond to each statement with a fact or legend card. Points are accumulated from correct answers. Questions should include history, location, skills, why the tribe "left" Arkansas, and what evidences of their group are found in Arkansas today (i.e. celebrations, names, etc.) along with any "legend-like" statements.

Plan a field trip to the Museum of Discovery for the program "Arkansas Indian Legacy" or check out the Museum's Learning Box "Indians of Arkansas."

Study Materials: "Norristown Mountain Legend" (included)

See Butler Center Lesson Plan: **Native Americans in Arkansas**

*These lesson plans are made possible in part through the support of the Arkansas Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

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## **“Norristown Mountain Legend”**

From *Buried Treasures of the American Southwest*. Copyright 1989 by W. C. Jameson.  
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### **Norristown Mountain Silver**

Not far from Russellville near the Arkansas River lies Norristown Mountain. For years the mountain was a major landmark in the area, overlooking homesteads along the prairie that extended from its base to the tavern set just above the old steamboat landing on the river.

Many generations before the arrival of the whites, a tribe of Osage Indians who inhabited the area considered the mountain sacred. It has been written that the largest Indian burial ground in the state of Arkansas lies at the foot of Norristown Mountain and extends for many miles along the river.

As white settlers moved onto and around the mountain, attracted by an abundance of rich farmland and access to river transportation, the Osage were gradually pushed out. Many were resettled in Oklahoma, then known as Indian Territory. While they chose not to confront the white settlers in armed battle for the precious lands, the Indians did send a delegation from their tribe to Washington, D.C., to negotiate for the ownership of the mountain and the strip of land that was their burial ground. Their request was granted, and the property in question remained in their possession for nearly one hundred years. As the older members of the tribe died off and the younger ones sought their fortunes elsewhere, only very few remained to live near the mountain. Today only a handful of those who live nearby are descendants of the original inhabitants. Each year for many years, however, several dozens of the descendants of the original in-habitants journeyed from Oklahoma to the mountain, remained a few weeks in celebration, and then departed.

As time went by, the entire area was eventually purchased by Peter Lovely. Lovely was a friendly man, who got along very well with the few Indians remaining in the vicinity, and he and his wife freely granted them permission to continue to use the sacred mountain for their gatherings and celebrations. From time to time the Indians would visit the Lovely residence and present Mrs. Lovely with beautiful hand-crafted silver ornaments. When she inquired as to the origin of the silver from which the gifts were made, the Indians always pointed toward the mountain.

One afternoon as Mrs. Lovely walked along the bank of the Arkansas River, she witnessed the burial ceremony of an aged Indian who at one time had been a prominent leader of the tribe. The ceremony was rather elaborate and lasted for nearly two hours. Just prior to filling the grave with dirt, the Indians, one by one, walked by the grave and dropped in offerings. In each case the offering consisted of hand-made silver jewelry much like that received by Mrs. Lovely. When they had finished, Mrs. Lovely estimated that they had deposited half a bushel of silver.

After the burial, Mrs. Lovely engaged an elderly squaw in conversation. The old woman told her what a great chief the old man had been and how Indians had come from hundreds of miles away to participate in the burial ceremony. When Mrs. Lovely remarked at what must have been a fortune in silver lying in the grave, the old squaw

told her that it had come from the old mine on the mountain. "If the white man knew what was in the sacred mountain," she said, "his horses would all be shod with silver shoes!"

Word eventually spread about the possibility of a silver mine on Norristown Mountain, and for years a great deal of prospecting and digging took place. It was said that the Indians had taken elaborate precautions to conceal their mine, and to this day there are reportedly only two or three Indians who know its exact location. To date, however, the only rock of any value officially associated with the mountain is a thin seam of coal.

In 1926 there arrived in Russellville a man identified as a "half-breed Spanish prospector!" The man was observed for several days searching the area of the old burial ground. From time to time he would consult an aged map he carried with him. Following several days of searching, he employed two men from town to do some digging. He led them, along with a mule carrying shovels and a crate, to the burial ground during the dark of night and instructed them to dig in a preselected spot. Working under the dim light of a lantern, the two men had to dig several holes before they unearthed a shovelful of silver artifacts.

The half-breed and the workers removed all the silver and placed it in the crate. Once the crate was loaded onto the mule the man instructed the two diggers not to reveal to anyone the events that had taken place that night, and promised he would return the next day with a large reward for their efforts. Several days passed and the half-breed did not return. The two men became upset at not receiving their promised reward and told the story to others.

One man who has lived in the area for many years and claims to be a professional dowser related how he had dowsed for and found several small chunks of silver on the mountain. He believes the little pieces of silver he has picked up were part of the residue of mine tailings that the Indians scattered around the mountain top as they tried to conceal evidence of mining activity. The old man is currently using his dowsing skills to try to locate the main vein of ore from which the small nuggets came. No one has actually seen the silver nuggets he claims to have found, but since he has been dowsing on the mountain for the past twelve years, he has been able to afford a forty-acre tract of land near Conway, and he has gotten a new pickup truck each year for the past four years. These purchases have been made with cash.

The Osage say that the silver will never be found by one who wishes to profit from it and that it can be removed only by one who will use it for the good of the people. They say the time will come in the far distant future when the silver will be needed, but until then it is not to be found.

**Note:** *This narrative is a legend and not presented as historical fact.*